

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 2458

S E C R E T BEIRUT 8718

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, LE, IS, US, SY

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN LEBANON

REF: (A) STATE 296267, (B) BEIRUT 8661, (C) BEIRUT 8652

1. I MET WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS AT 1230 DEC 5 AT HIS RESIDENCE
AND MADE POINTS PARA ONE REF A.

2. THE NEED FOR THE ASF IN SOUTH LEBANON. AS SOON AS I HAD
FINISHED MY PRESENTATION, SARKIS ASKED, "HOW DO YOU EXPECT
ME TO ESTABLISH SECURITY IN LEBANON IF I DO NOT CONTROL
TYRE?" HE SAID HIS SECURITY PEOPLE HAD INFORMED HIM THAT AS
LATE AS LAST WEEK ARMS SHIPMENTS FOR LEFTIST/PALESTINIAN
GROUPS WERE STILL ARRIVING VIA THAT PORT. IT MADE NO SENSE TO
TRY TO COLLECT THE HEAVY ARMS NOW IN THE HANDS OF THE VARIOUS
MILITIAS AND PALESTINIAN GROUPS "WHILE THE DOOR WAS STILL OPEN"
FOR MORE TO ENTER. NOR COULD HE "PUT HIS HAND ON JOUNIEH"
(PRESUMABLY TO STOP CONTINUING ILLEGAL ARMS SHIPMENTS TO CHRISTIAN
MILITIAS THROUGH THIS PORT) UNLESS HE COULD DO THE SAME IN
TYRE. HE ALSO REFERRED AGAIN TO THE THREE PALESTINIAN REFUGEE
CAMPS IN THE TYRE AREA THAT MUST BE BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL.
SARKIS REPEATED THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO USE LEBANESE
FORCES, SAYING THAT IT WOULD TAKE HIM AT LEAST TWO OR THREE
MONTHS TO ORGANIZE A LEBANESE FORCE THAT WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE
TO HIM AND ACCEPTABLE TO ALL SIDES. HE COULD NOT WAIT THAT LONG.

3. ASF COMMANDER COL AL-HAJJ, WHO JOINED THE CONVERSATION LATER,
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SAID THAT CONTROL OF NABATIYAH IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT. NOT ONLY

IS THERE A LARGE REFUGEE CAMP ON THE ZAHRANI-NABATIYAH ROAD BUT THERE IS ALSO AN AIRSTRIP 1900 METERS LONG IN THE AREA. THIS AIRSTRIP, COL AL-HAJJ SAID, WAS THE ONLY ONE IN LEBANON NOT UNDER ASF CONTROL AND HAD RECENTLY BEEN USED TO BRING IN ARMS FOR THE (LEFTIST) FIGHTING GROUPS IN THAT AREA. HE CLAIMED NOT TO KNOW THE SOURCE OF THESE ARMS BUT SAID THE AIRSTRIP MUST BE SHUT DOWN.

4. USE OFF NON-SYRIAN ASF TROOPS. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION WHETHER THERE WERE ANY NON-SYRIAN ASF TROOPS THAT COULD BE USED TO OCCUPY TYRE AND NABATIYAH IF THE ISRAELIS ACQUIESCED, PRESIDENT SARKIS CALLED IN ASF COMMANDER AL-HAJJ FOR A REVIEW OF THE ASF TROOP SITUATION. AL-HAJJ SAID THAT HE WAS STILL SHORT OF TROOPS; THE SAUDI FORCE IN THE CHOUF NEEDED REINFORCEMENT, AND MORE TROOPS WERE NEEDED ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY, INCLUDING BEIRUT. HOWEVER, DESPITE EARLIER ASSURANCES, THE SAUDIS HAVE RECENTLY INFORMED PRESIDENT SARKIS THAT THEY WILL NOT BE SENDING ANY MORE TROOPS. THE LIBYANS WERE LEAVING AND THE SOUTHERN YEMENIS, WHO HAD NOT YET ARRIVED, WOULD NOT BE SUITABLE FOR USE IN THE SOUTH FOR IDEOLOGICAL REASONS. AL-HAJJ SUGGESTED THAT EITHER SUDANI, NORTH YEMENI, OR UAE FORCES, WHICH WERE EXPECTED SOON, MIGHT BE USED IN TYRE AND NABATIYAH BUT REPEATED HIS PREFERENCE FOR SYRIAN FORCES BECAUSE THEY WERE "MORE EFFICIENT" AND MORE FAMILIAR WITH THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE. COL AL-HAJJ INDICATED THAT FROM A MILITARY POINT OF VIEW HE WOULD HAVE TROUBLE FINDING THE FORCES TO SEND TO TYRE AND NABATIYAH UNTIL THE EXPECTED REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVE, BUT PRESIDENT SARKIS MADE CLEAR THAT THE OCCUPATION OF TYRE IS ESSENTIAL FOR POLITICAL REASONS AND SAID HE WOULD FIND A WAY TO SEND A BATTALION THERE "TOMORROW," IF THE ISRAELIS AGREED.

5. THE LEBANESE-ISRAELI BORDER. COL AL-HAJJ SAID THAT THE BORDER AREA IS "EXPLOSIVE" AND HE WAS MAKING EVERY EFFORT IN CONVERSATIONS WITH THE VARIOUS PAATIES CONCERNED TO "FREEZE" THE SITUATION. HE SAID THAT THE SHIITES IN THE AREA ARE VERY WORRIED BY RUMORS THAT THEIR VILLAGES WERE GOING TO BE ATTACKED BY CHRISTIAN MILITIAS, SUPPORTED BY THE ISRAELIS AND HINTED THAT THE ISRAELIS WERE DELIBERATELY PROVOKING TENSION IN THE AREA. WHEN I ASKED IF THE LEB ARMY COMMANDER GEN HANNA SAID COULD BE OF HELP IN CALMING THE SITUATION, PRESIDENT SARKIS SAID

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HE COULD DO "VERY LITTLE," ADDING THAT THE INFLUENTIAL LEBANESE WERE CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND THE KATAEB. HE HOPED WE WOULD USE OUR INFLUENCE WITH ISRAEL TO URGE THEM TO CALM THE SITUATION.

6. THE REESTABLISHMENT OF SECURITY AND PALESTINIAN MOVEMENTS. PRESIDENT SARKIS SAID THAT IN GENERAL THE REESTABLISHMENT OFF SECURITY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY WAS GOING WELL; "THERE HAVE BEEN ONLY A FEW

MINOR INCIDENTS." HE SAID THERE HAD NOT BEEN MUCH MOVEMENT OF PALESTINIANS TOWARDS THE SOUTH, EXCEPT FOR THE EGYPTIAN AND SYRIAN BASED PLA UNITS SUCH AS THE AYN JALUT BRIGADE. BOTH SARKIS AND AL-HAJJ AGREED THAT THE PLO LEADERSHIP WAS NOT INTERESTED IN CAUSING SERIOUS TROUBLE ON THE FRONTIER. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION, THEY SAID THAT THE IRAQIS WERE LEAVING VIA THE PORTS OF SIDON AND TYRE AND ONLY ABOUT HALF OF THE PREVIOUS IRAQI FORCE WAS STILL IN THE COUNTRY.

7. SARKIS AND THE SYRIANS. PRESIDENT SARKIS SAID THAT HE WAS NOT REPEAT NOT RECEIVING ADVICE FROM THE SYRIANS AND HAD LITTLE LIAISON WITH THEM. "THEY HAVE LEFT IT TO ME WHEN AND WHERE THE ASF WILL GO," HE SAID.

8. COMMENT: PRESIDENT SARKIS HAS MADE A PERSUASIVE CASE FOR THE DEPLOYMENT OF SOME ELEMENTS OF ASF TO TYRE AND NABATIYAH. HE CLEARLY CANNOT ESTABLISH HIS AUTHORITY IN LEBANON AS A WHOLE UNTIL HE CAN (1) STOP ARMS SHIPMENTS THAT ARE ARRIVING OR COULD ARRIVE VIA THESE TWO CITIES AND (2) ESTABLISH CONTROL OVER THE LARGE PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS NEARBY. AS LONG AS THIS AREA IS NOT UNDER HIS CONTROL HE HAS NO LEVERAGE FOR CLAMPING DOWN IN JOUNIEH, WHERE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS MAY STILL BE BRINGING IN SOME ARMAMENTS SURREPTITIOUSLY AND THE POLITICAL RISK OF CONFISCATING WEAPONS MAY NOT BE WORTH IT IF BOTH SIDES CAN RESUPPLY THEMSELVES. WHILE IT WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE PREFERABLE TO STATION LEBANESE FORCES IN TYRE AND NABATIYAH, PRESIDENT SARKIS HAS STATED ON THREE SEPARATE OCCASIONS THAT HE HAS NO FORCE HE CAN USE FOR THIS PRUPOSE. IF HE ATTEMPTED TO USE ONE OF THE SECTARIAN PSEUDO-ARMIES NOW IN SECRET

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EXISTENCE, THE CIVIL WAR MIGHT START AGAIN AND THE PROBLEM OF ACHIEVING AN EVENTUAL POLITICAL RECONCILIATION WOULD BE GREATLY COMPLICATED. THUS HE HAS NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO USE THE ASF, WHICH WAS PUT UNDER HIS COMMAND BY THE ARAB LEAGUE, TO BRING THE TYRE-NABATIYAH REGION UNDER HIS CONTROL. IF IT IS US POLICY TO SUPPORT "LEBANON'S INDEPENDENCE, NATIONAL UNITY, SOVEREIGNTY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND COHESION," (STATE 295130) AND "PRESIDENT SARKIS' ESTABLISHMENT OF HIS AUTHORITY THROUGHOUT LEBANON," (STATE 291206) WE MUST USE ALL OUR INFLUENCE O PER-SUADE ISRAEL THAT THE STATIONING OF ONE OR TWO BATTALIONS OF ASF FORCES IN TYRE AND NABATIYAH (NOT REPEAT NOT ALONG THE BORDER) IS LESS OF A THREAT TO THEM THAN THE LAWLESS SITUATION THAT COULD DEVELOP IF THE PRESENT SITUATION CONTINUES.

9. SUGGEST DEPT PASS THIS MESSAGE TO DAMASCUS AND TEL AVIV.

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